

EXPLORING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLERS' INHIBITING FACTORS IN ENGLISH WRITING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

This explanatory sequential mixed method study aims to determine the students' attitudes toward the main inhibiting factor of English writing activity and skill development supported by the teacher's perception. Beyond writing being one of the most complex languages and communication skills to be mastered, the success or failure of students in writing could also be influenced by various factors. This study discusses five factors: affective factor, writing apprehension, linguistic factor, writer's block, and tactical factor. The eleventh-grade students and a senior English teacher of one public school in Malang became the participants in the study. This study has two types of data: qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data are collected first, then qualitative data to support explaining or elaborate on the quantitative result. This research uses two instruments: 1) a closed-ended questionnaire to obtain quantitative data on learners' perceptions, and 2) a semi-structured interview to draw the teacher's perspective. The qualitative data analysis was conducted using statistical analysis. A descriptive analysis was applied to analyze and describe the qualitative data. The main inhibiting factor in English writing activity faced by the eleventh graders of Senior High school 1 Malang was the writer's block factor related to students' motivational block at the beginning or during the writing process and their difficulties in developing and connecting different ideas.

Keywords: *English writing skills, inhibiting factors, students' perception*

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism is an example of actions caused by the low students' desire and competence in writing. Yet in reputable school with an average of excellent students like SMAN 1 Malang, writing is still a formidable activity for the students. Writing is genuinely one of the most complex languages and communication skills to be mastered (Kurt & Atay, 2007; Latif, 2007; Ismail et al., 2018), and the success or failure of students in writing could also be influenced by a variety of factors. Moreover, asking students to write in other or second languages will give additional pressure since they have to be aware of that second/other language features while assuring that the writing is well organized and coherent (Deb, 2018). Lee (2005) said that second or foreign language writing is "an acknowledged difficulty for most of ESL and EFL learners at all levels." Students as second language writers must concurrently undergo the writing and English language learning process (Shehzadi & Krishnasamy, 2018). Even though with all of those complex writing requirements, still in this digital actually the students could easily find digital writing assistant to help their writing process.

Moreover, in the educational field, English writing plays a vital role as one of the primary resources of world knowledge (Sarwat, 2021). According to Deane (2018), "writing is the

most significant development in human history." Writing is a medium to exchange thoughts, information, knowledge, and opinions from a country to others and over generations (Sarwat, 2021). The reflection of someone's language and critical thinking development processes could be seen in their writing (Vygotsky, 1962). Writing is vital in allowing learners to state their ideas and perceptions, build interaction and communication, and compose logical and persuasive arguments (Fitriani, 2020). Writing activity strengthens students' learning and thinking as a reflection of their English language in the academic situation (Rao, 2017). However, many factors inhibit students' writing skills development. In the English writing context. Inhibiting factors become students' barriers and obstacles to developing their writing skills. There are many obstruction factors in writing, such as affective factors, writing apprehension, linguistic factors, writer's block, and tactical factors. Affective factors are many emotions that can affect students' learning performance, including attitudes, self-efficacy, and emotion (Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021). Writing apprehension refers to a condition where the students tend to avoid or approach a specific writing situation due to their previous experiences. Anxiety, bad experiences, and teachers' or peers' negative feedback and comment (Novariana et al., 2018) are examples of factors that lead to writing apprehension. The terms of linguistic factors related to the competency of students in the second language components such as grammatical knowledge and vocabulary mastery, also knowledge of writing mechanism and organization (Sarwat, 2021.). Writer's block includes difficulties in developing ideas and losing motivation during the writing process. Lastly, tactical factors include the teacher's teaching method and students' learning strategies.

Furthermore, research studies on this topic have been conducted several times to reveal the challenges faced by students in various contexts and levels. A mixed method study held by Sarwat et al. (2021) was purposed to examine the challenges and inhibiting factors of 155 elementary students in their writing skills improvement process. Lack of exposure to the English language, inadequate grammatical rules knowledge, and unsuitable teaching method were their main issues in writing English.

Senior High School students in Surakarta also faced similar issues with other additional factors, as seen in research by Novariana et al. (2018). 27 EFL learners from SMAN 1 Surakarta participated in this study. In this case, the grammatical issue became the most internal problem in writing English, and lack of motivation was another factor. Meanwhile, an external factor that affects students is the lack of exposure to practice. This study also described some suggestions for teachers to help students, such as giving them positive feedback and reinforcement, and the opportunity to comprehend and solve their writing issues. Furthermore, give them practice encouragement, assign appropriate placement tests without requiring them to write hastily, provide some revisions with if needed, and ask students' perceptions of their work. Sudarwan (2010, as cited from Rohaniyah & Nisak, 2019) added that the teacher should implement suitable teaching technique and strategy to make the students get easy in learning. The teacher also needs to understand the students' learning style.

In the context of the U.S. college community, a qualitative study was conducted by Heather B. Finn (2018) to analyze the reason for four students' failures in writing class. All four EFL/ESL learners have lived several years in the U.S. However, still fail in writing class and have to retake the course for the second or third time. This study tried to reveal students' perceptions of the factors why they had to take the class more than once. Frustration and

anxiety they got from previous bad experiences related to lecturers, instructors, or “with their own linguistic challenges” were revealed as the primary key to their failures.

Those previous studies become the references of this current research, however, there are still significant differences between this study with those previous. First, this present study explores the students’ writing English inhibiting factors that are divided into five categories to get a wider as well as an in-depth understanding of the students’ problems. Second, the different of research subject levels. This present research’s subjects were the eleventh-graders from SMAN 1 Malang. Third, the different result of the study. A study by Sarwat et al (2021) found that English grammatical knowledge as the main problem faced by the students. The similar findings were found in a study of Novariana et al (2018) that the most internal problem was the lack of grammar competence and the external issue was the lack of practice. On the other hand, Finn (2018) found that the main reasons why ESL students failed in their writing class several times were because of the anxiety they got from bad writing experiences. Meanwhile, this current research found that the students’ main inhibition in English writing activity was the writer’s block factors that related to unmotivated feeling in starting or continuing the writing, mental block, and difficulty in developing ideas.

It can be concluded that the main factors of students’ failure in writing are different in various contexts and levels. Furthermore, Fati (2013) sums up the results of her study that EFL learners with a lower English writing proficiency face more obstacles than those in a middle or high level. Without enough understanding of each learner’s difficulties in writing, the best treatment and solution for each case will not be found. Therefore, teachers also need support from the learners’ point of view about their writing ability and perception of their writing issues, as “there are many reasons that cannot be expressed by the students in the result of the test” (Novariana et al., 2018). Those perspectives might be an evaluation for the teaching and learning method next time. Thus, the research question of this study is:

1. What are the main factors that inhibit students to write in English from the senior high school students’ and teacher’s perception?

With the objective of the study:

1. To find out main factors that inhibit students to write in English from the students’ perception and teacher’s experiences

This study becomes significant as it is focused on exploring and analyzing the main inhibited factors in writing English activities faced by EFL Senior High School students in the Malang context. This study was conducted also as a response to the negative behavior of the eleventh-grade students in SMA N 1 Malang which was plagiarism in writing. The data is based on students’ perceptions and supported by the teacher’s experiences during teaching writing in two semesters. The result of this study could be an evaluation of the teacher’s teaching strategies and media. Furthermore, teachers or other educational parties could upgrade, redevelop and differentiate (if needed) the teaching strategies to maximize the development of students’ English writing activities and motivation.

METHOD

Research Design

Sequential Explanatory Mixed-method design is applied in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem. A mixed method study is a study that collects,

analyses, and mixes both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In sequential explanatory mixed-method design, the data are collected in two phases. The quantitative data are collected first, then qualitative data to support explaining or elaborate on the quantitative result (Creswell, 2012).

Respondents

Population

The populations of this study were the eleventh-grade students of Senior High School 1 Malang. The eleventh-graders were chosen because they already have adequate experience in writing English to share in this research.

Sample

The researcher used a purposive sampling technique in determining the sample of the study which aimed to learn and understand a phenomenon happened in particular population (Creswell, 2014). One hundred twenty-nine students from four different classes and a senior English teacher became the participant. These 129 students were taught by the same teacher (who also became the participant in this study) in the tenth grade using the same teaching method and learning output.

Instruments

This current study employed two research instruments to collect the data. The instruments were a closed-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guideline. These instruments aimed to find complete information regarding participants' problems related to this research's issues. In this study, the researcher distributed a close-ended questionnaire to collect the quantitative data as it made easier for the researcher to obtain data from many samples or participants. The close-ended questionnaire aimed to find out senior high school students' main inhibiting factors in English writing. The closed-ended questionnaire was divided into five dimensions: affective factors, writing apprehension, linguistic factors, writer's block, and tactical factors. The statements in Affective factors, Students' writing apprehension, and Writer's block dimensions were adapted from the *Writing Apprehension Test* by Daly and Miller (1975) and *Self-beliefs, Writing-beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS)* by Wright et al (2019). The statements in Linguistic Factors dimension were adopted from a questionnaire developed by Sarwat et al. (2021). The validity and reliability of the instruments has also been tested using SPSS software.

A semi-structured interview is an interview in which the interviewer asks only several planned questions and the rest of the questions are not prepared in advance. Through the interview, the issue can be obtained a deep and understanding of students' barrier in English writing skills development through textual interpretation of the data obtained.

Procedures

The procedures of conducting the research are: first, conducted a closed-ended questionnaire for the students. The participants answering the questionnaire through Google Form platform. Before filling the questionnaire, the researcher briefed the participants and gave explanation about the research and the statements in the questionnaire. After the questionnaire result was obtained, the data then being analysed and interpreted to get the quantitative data. After understanding the quantitative result, the researcher conducted an

interview with the teacher to get additional and supporting data concerning the students' inhibition and obstacles in learning writing English and what the teacher had done to handle those issues. The interview was held through WhatsApp chat. The researcher then analysed the data using descriptive analysis and interpreted the qualitative results.

Data analysis

The qualitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical analysis, including the mean score. The analysis process is supported by statistical software, SPSS. The result will be presented in the form of a descriptive analysis.

After collecting qualitative data from the interview, the results were recorded and rewritten word for word. A descriptive analysis was applied to analyse and describe the data. The procedures for analysing data were adapted from Widodo's (2014) framework, which includes familiarizing with the interview data by listening to the recorded data carefully, transcribing the data into written form, reading and re-reading the transcription several times (Nurbuat et al., 2022), identify students' issues in English writing class, and identify strategies to overcome those problems.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This chapter presents the finding and discussion toward students' inhibiting factors in English writing activities. The data was obtained through closed-ended questionnaire, open-ended questionnaire, and interview to answer the research problem. The result was based on the students' and teacher's experiences.

Students' Perception on Affective Factors

Table 1. Statistical Analysis of Students' Perception on Affective Factors

Variable	No	Statements	N	Mean
Affective factors	1.	English Writing is difficult and stressful for me.	129	2.33
	2.	I face many obstacles in English writing activities.	129	2.71
	3.	I'm afraid of writing because I cannot write better or as well as the other friends	129	2.44
	4.	I don't feel confident in my ability to express ideas in writing.	129	2.46
	5.	I often just copy-paste people's writing on the internet.	129	2.50
	6.	Sometimes I also copy-paste my friend's work.	129	2.29
	7.	I have yet to find a strong reason why I should learn to write English.	129	2.36

According to data on table 1, majority of students already have positive attitude toward writing. Most of them were not agree that writing is stressful and difficult activity as in item number 1 with the mean score of (2.33). Even so, they still face many obstacles and have a tend to low-level of self-esteem as could be seen in item 3 (mean score of 2.44) and 4 (mean score of 2.46). Item number 5 to 7 aims to identify students' motivation in writing. It is found that most EFL learners were not agree that they often do plagiarism from the internet (mean

2.50) and often copy-paste their friend's work (mean score 2.29). Furthermore, they mostly have not realized and found the reason why they have to learn English writing (mean score 2.36).

Students' Attitudes on Writing Apprehension Factors

Table 2. Statistical Analysis of Students' Perception on Writing Apprehension Factors

Variable	No	Statements	N	Mean
Writing apprehension	1.	I expect to do poorly in English writing activities even before I start writing.	129	2.27
	2.	I feel that I will always make many errors in writing.	129	2.50
	3.	I feel that I will always be the last/the worst in writing class.	129	2.02
	4.	No one seemed to enjoy what I have written.	129	2.34
	5.	Even when I had worked hard, I did not get good scores.	129	2.48
	6.	Discussing my writing with my friends is a bad experience because they never appreciated my ideas.	129	2.01
	7.	My teacher never appreciated my writing progress and improvement that made me discouraged.	129	2.00

Writing apprehension factors got the lowest mean score which ranges from 2.00 to 2.50. As seen in statement number 2, even though more learners still assumed that they will always make a lot of writing error they, however, did not worry about being the worst writer in the class because they believe they would not be. They also have no crucial bad experiences related to teachers' or peers' negative feedback as in item number 4 to 7. The majority of respondents, moreover, disagreed with statement number 7 which appeared to get the lowest mean score of (2.00) and indicated that their teacher did encourage them by giving appreciation to the progress and improvement they made.

Students' Perception on Linguistic Factors

Table 3. Statistical Analysis of Students' Perception on Linguistic Factors

Variable	No	Statements	N	Mean
Linguistic factor	1.	I face difficulties in making good and correct sentences because of my lack of ability in grammar.	129	2.81
	2.	I always faced problems with tenses that will be used.	129	2.81
	3.	Frequent mistakes in grammar affect my effective writing expression.	129	2.83
	4.	It's hard for me to express my ideas because I only knew a few English words.	129	2.54
	5.	I often choose the wrong words to explain/express something in my writing.	129	2.68
	6.	Small errors in writing mechanisms, such as typos, incorrect punctuation, or inappropriate	129	2.66

capital letter still be an issue for me.

This third variable dealt with the students' perception over how English linguistic factors affect their learning writing progress and result. The mean value of this domain ranges from 2.54 to 2.83 which got the second highest mean score. In most questions, the majority of participants agreed that the English linguistic factor mainly the English grammar was a restriction for them to develop their writing skill and product. Started with having a lack of English grammar knowledge that led students to get difficulties in making great and correct sentences (mean score of 2.81). They also hard to choose appropriate time tenses for their writing. Because of these grammar issues, their effective writing expression got affected. The other language features that greatly influence their writing is the vocabulary mastery and writing mechanism comprehension such as punctuation, capital letter, and typo. Most students admitted that it was hard for them to express their ideas because of their lack of English words. Meanwhile, many of them realize that they often choose the wrong words to express something in English.

Students' Perception on Writer's Block Factors

Table 4. Statistical Analysis of Students' Perception on Writer's Block Factors

Variable	No	Statements	N	Mean
Writer's block	1.	During the process of writing, I often get blank and can't develop my ideas	129	2.82
	2.	While writing, I usually face difficulties in connecting different ideas.	129	2.81
	3.	It's hard for me to focus on writing for a long period of time.	129	2.69
	4.	Sometimes I lose my motivation during the writing process.	129	2.80
	5.	Being unmotivated becomes one of my biggest issues in starting or continuing my writing.	129	2.83

Writer's block became the main inhibiting factor in English writing based on the data got from the closed-ended questionnaire. This variable got the highest mean score, ranging from 2.69 to 2.83. It could be concluded that the majority of learners face the same issue and agree with most of the statements. Table 1 shows that students often get blank and could not develop their writing ideas. They also have problem in connecting different ideas and make the paragraph coherent. Some of respondents also difficult to stay focus in a long period of time to work on their writing. Students were mostly agreeing items number 4 and 5, which related to motivational block. They admitted that sometime they lose motivation to continue their writing (mean score of 2.80), even, most of them unmotivated from the beginning (mean score of 2.83).

Students' Perception on Tactical Factors

Table 5. Statistical Analysis of Students' Perception on Tactical Factors

Variable	No	Statements	N	Mean
Tactical factors	1.	I don't usually practice writing a lot.	129	2.74
	2.	After finishing my writing, I didn't review or proofread my work.	129	2.32
	3.	The minim of detailed feedback from my teacher makes me unaware of my mistakes.	129	2.63
	4.	My teacher gives me fewer opportunities to write.	129	2.40

The last variable discussed about the students' view and perception toward the tactical factor in writing, the mean score ranges from 2.32 to 2.74. In several items, such as item 1, got relatively a high mean value of (2.74) and low standard deviation (0.628) which demonstrated students' agreements of statement that they do not usually practice their writing skills a lot. However, many of them admitted that they proofread and re-reading their work. They also revealed that they were mostly unaware of their mistakes as the teacher gave minim detailed feedback on their writing (mean value of 2.63).

Teacher's Semi-Structured Interview Interpretation

The teaching English writing experiences of a senior English language teacher in Senior High School 1 Malang regarding the students' problems and inhibition in learning English writing skills will be discussed below. There were five questions in total answered by the informant.

The first question was asking how the teacher perceives teaching English writing skills. Is it harder than teaching the other English skills or not? Even though many requirements must be understood by the students before writing, such as part of speech, phrases, sentence structure, English grammar, vocabulary, and writing mechanism. However, the teacher sees teaching writing as hard as teaching other English skills. Throughout her answer, she explained her observation result on factors that she saw can influence the effectiveness of students' learning writing process. Here is her explanation.

If seen from the student's writing process and learning results, the teacher said that students were not able to develop their ideas into sentences since all this time, students only copy-pasted, played games, and were not used to communicate in written form, especially during the online learning. This data is in line with the quantitative result that found the main inhibition of students' English writing activities was the writer's block factors which the students had difficulties in developing their ideas, were stuck at the certain point without being able to move forward or write something new. Students admitted that during the process of writing, they often get blank and cannot develop their ideas. They also usually face difficulties in connecting different ideas. They agreed that it is hard for them to focus on writing for a long period of time. Sometimes they lose their motivation during the writing process or even unmotivated in starting or continuing their writing.

Furthermore, she explained the main factors that affect students' writing effectiveness are their understanding of the topic and their grammar comprehension. Students who rarely read will not have much insight, reasoning, or sufficient ideas development. Furthermore, students with well comprehension in grammar can write better. Her experience supported the

quantitative result that the lack of grammatical rules knowledge became the second main inhibition of students' English writing activities. Students face difficulties in making good and correct sentences because of the lack of ability in grammar mainly in determining the tenses that will be used in their sentences which affect their effective writing expression. Because the lack of vocabulary mastery students difficult to express their ideas and opinion in English and sometimes choose the wrong words to explain something.

From consultation and discussion with students, she could conclude that most students were not interested in writing because of those obstacles. To help learners overcome their problems and identify them, the teacher implemented this strategy. Before writing, she told the students to make a plan and draft first. For example, when writing a biography, she told them to search for the data of that particular person and then list the data. The data, later on, will be processed to become a text. If the text were not fully covered the listed biodata, it meant that it was not their work.

Discussion

Based on the data found from descriptive statistical analysis, the fourth variable, which is writer's block, got the highest mean score (ranging from 2.69 to 2.83). In this variable, all the questions are related to students' perception of how motivational block, losing interest and enthusiasm influenced their English writing activities and skills improvement. Based on the data, most learners often got blank and could not develop their writing. Sometimes, they also lose motivation during the writing process or are even unmotivated from the beginning. The second main inhibition is the English linguistic factor, with a mean score of 2.54 to 2.83. It was found that most of the students perceived that the lack of English grammar knowledge inhibits them from writing good and correct sentences.

This finding was supported by the teacher's statement that students could not develop their ideas into sentences as all this time students only copy-pasted and were not used to communicate in written form. Besides that, Ahmed (2020) in her study found the similar result that 74% of students were unable to develop the writing content of their own. The difficulty to develop writing content was the impact of students' low reading habit. Sometimes students also lose motivation during the writing process or are even unmotivated from the beginning. This finding also supports the result of previous studies by Novariana et al (2018) that the lack of students' motivation was another writing inhibiting factor. However, in many cases, blocks in writing apparently occurred during the decision-making process more often than during making correlation and find new ideas (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009; Lubart, 2009; Nelson, 1993 in Ahmed, 2020).

The second main inhibition is the English linguistic factor, with mean scores ranging from 2.54 to 2.83. It was found that most of the students perceived the lack of English grammar knowledge and the low competence in vocabulary mastery inhibit them from writing good and correct sentences. The teacher supported this result by saying, "if they comprehend grammar well, thus they can write well". This findings strengthen the data found by Islam & Mufidah (2022) that the highest error made by the students in writing English is the omission of verb and tenses markers. This research finding is also in line with Sarwat et al. (2021); Novariana et al. (2018); Fareed et al. (2016) that the major English writing issues were grammar and vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, Mukarromah & Suryanto (2022) found those grammatical errors were influenced by their first language (L1) interferences. Often students

imitate the grammatical rules of the L1, and led to incorrect translation of sentences in the L1 into L2 (target language).

Meanwhile, variable two, the writing apprehension factors, did not have a significant impact on students' writing process. This variable got the lowest mean score (ranging from 2.00-2.50). Even though some learners still feel that they will always make some errors, their anxiety was not becoming the main issue. This contrary to the research finding of Finn's (2018) study that writing anxiety and bad experiences were the primary key of students' failure.

Among 29 items in the questionnaire, the highest mean score was obtained by two items. First, statement number three in variable three (linguistic factors) states, "Frequent mistakes in grammar affect my effective writing expression", and second is item number five in variable four (writer's block), which says, "Unmotivated becomes one of my biggest issues to start or continue my writing". The high mean score indicates that most students agree with the statements and face the same problem. On the other hand, item number seven in variable two got the lowest score. The statement is, "My teacher never appreciated my writing progress and improvement that discouraged me". It means they did not have a problem with bad experiences related to the teacher's negative feedback.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion and result of the study, it can be seen that the main inhibiting factor in English writing activity faced by the eleventh graders of Senior High school 1 Malang was the writer's block. This factor related to students' motivational block at the beginning or during the process of writing and their difficulties to develop and to connect different ideas. This finding was a conclusion from the quantitative data supported by qualitative result. The inhibitions that affect students' writing process and skills development sequenced from the most voted to the less impactful are: writer's block, linguistic factors, tactical factors, affective factors, and writing apprehension. To help the students solve their problems, the teacher usually asks them to plan, and drafting also collects supporting data first. Identifying her/his students' English language skills, their writing ability, as well as their obstacles in writing first before she/he start teaching is crucial for the teacher. This current study found that students often get bored and being unmotivated in starting and continuing their writing. Therefore, it can be suggested that the teacher needs to develop innovative strategies to motivate learners, as well as keeps guiding them in the process of writing. There are several strategies that considerably effective to support learners' writing activities, such as, implementing scaffolding principles, giving the students detail and timely feedback, and integrating technology-based learning to help them solve their writing problems.

The finding of this study, however, could not be generalized to assess other groups of students with different learning and knowledge level. Therefore, it is obvious that this current research still has limitation and weaknesses, and it could be suggested for further research to explore students' English writing problems at different levels of cognitive or English competence to see whether each level has different issues.

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